

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
521 East 8th Street
National City
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1959

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS No. CA-1959

ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Location: 521 East 8th Street, National City, San Diego
County, California.

USGS National City Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
11.490560.3615370.

Present Owner
and Occupant: Parish of St. Matthew's, 521 East 8th Street,
National City, California (1971).

Present Use: Religious services.

Statement of
Significance: St. Matthew's Episcopal Church was constructed in
1887 during National City's boom years. The
building is not only notable for the high quality
of its craftsmanship, but for its use of local
talents and products.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: The church was built in 1887. The first services were held on July 3, 1887 and the church was consecrated by Bishop Nichols on October 24, 1890.
2. Architect: There is some disagreement as to who is the architect of the structure. Local tradition has always ascribed the building to Henry E. Cooper. However, Irene Phillips in National City: Pioneer Town (page 41) states that "Mr. Crocker of Chula Vista, designed the church, inspired by some pictures of a small church in the south of England." In addition, she quotes a newspaper description (see number 5, Original Plans and Construction) that cites Mr. Crocker as the designer.

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3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1882 Frank Kimball and his brother deeded a piece of property to St. Matthew's. This property was held in trust by Reverend Wilber and sold in 1886 for \$20,000 (the money was used to construct the church). The site for the building was donated by Mr. Elizur Steele. The church has been owned, since its construction, by the Parish of St. Matthew's.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The building was constructed out of local brick and lumber finished at the Kimball's mill.
5. Original plans and construction: Irene Phillips in National City: Pioneer Town (page 41) cites the National City Record's account of the building: "It is designed along gothic lines and will seat 200 persons. In the interior Mr. Crocker adhered to the symbolism of the Episcopal Faith: the entrance, Baptism; the nave, the Church Militant; chancel or choir, the Church Triumphant; the sanctuary, Heaven."
6. Alterations and additions: Several minor alterations have been made to the structure over the years. The roof was originally covered with wooden shingles and is now covered with wood-colored composition shingles. The foundation, originally of red brick, has been replaced by concrete blocks on a continuous poured cement foundation. A fire door on the west side of the church has been installed to comply with building code regulations. The wooden steps to the sacristy door have been replaced with a cement ramp, which serves this door and the fire door above. The ramp has been installed to meet safety requirements. Electric lights have been installed. Gas space heaters have been installed. Both the electrical wiring, the heaters, and their apparatus have been installed in such a manner as to be as unobtrusive as possible. A balcony has been built at the south end of the building. It is over the foyer, and is reached by stairs against the east and west walls of the building. The altar, which was originally against the north wall of the building has been moved forward, so there is now a passage way all around the altar. This is in keeping with the present day altar arrangement in the Episcopal church. A pipe organ has been installed, and to provide a place for pipes and other parts of the organ, a false north wall has been built several feet in

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front of the original wall. Original pews have been replaced with more comfortable pews. The altar area has been remodeled with a new screen at the termination of the space. Formerly there was a rose window at the north end of the sanctuary on axis. The opening is still visible from behind the screen.

B. Historic Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. St. Matthew's Episcopal Church: The Episcopal Society was formed in National City on January 30, 1882. One of the prominent members was Mr. Frank Kimball, founder of National City, who was the secretary of the Society. On May 13, 1882 the society changed into St. Matthew's Parish Episcopal Church with Mr. Kimball remaining as secretary. The church held services on Sundays, using ministers from San Diego; meeting first in homes, and by 1886 in the Grange Hall. In 1882 Frank Kimball and his brother deeded a piece of property to the church, which was held in trust for several years. This property was sold in 1886 for \$20,000. The site for the church was donated by Mr. Elizur Steele, and the building was constructed in 1887. This was a period of intense building activity in National City's boom years of the later 1880's. There are no records of the cost of the church, but it was less than \$20,000; the remainder of the sum was invested in real estate in Otay.

C. Bibliography

a. Primary and unpublished:

Washington, D.C. National Register of Historic Places.
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church (by Carolyn M. Ross, 1973).

b. Secondary and published:

American Institute of Architects. AIA Guide to San Diego. San Diego: San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, 1970.

Phillips, Irene. National City Pioneer Town. National City, California: South Bay Press, 1960.

Prepared by Mary Beth Betts
Historic American
Buildings Survey
January 1979

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: St. Matthew's Episcopal Church was constructed in 1887 during National City's boom years. While designed along the lines of an English country church, the building is a product of local talents and materials. The church with its gothic details is dominated by a tall attached side tower.
2. Condition of fabric: The church is in excellent structural condition and is well maintained; portions of the exterior are in need of minor repairs.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is rectangular (three-bay front), with a rectangular addition on the north, and measures 39' x 96'.
2. Foundation: The original foundations were of brick manufactured in the Kimball brick yards of National City. Present foundations are of concrete block.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The 8" walls are frame with board siding, and painted white. Above the main window sill line, the siding is laid horizontally; below it is vertical. The corners and the windows are delineated with flat board trim (1" x 6") which is painted brown.
4. Structural system, framing: The church has a wooden stud wall system which supports the roof trusses. The trusses are simple rafters connected by a tie beam and reinforced with diagonal braces. The tower is constructed with heavy timbers (6" x 6", 4" x 6", 2" x 4") which are pegged together.
5. Porches, stoops: The small front porch was added to the building in 1892. It has a concrete stoop (probably of a later date). To the west of the church there is a concrete ramp and platform to the door at the vestibule.
6. Chimneys: There are no chimneys; instead the modern forced air furnaces have vent stacks which rise through the roof.

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7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The major entry to the church is on the south (front) elevation. It is composed of two doors separated by a jamb. On the east side of the building there is a door which opens into the sanctuary (its porch has been removed). A door facing south on the side projection provides access to the side vestibule. On the west side of the nave there is a new fire door (painted white) which is rather inconspicuous. The entry doors and the east door have flat heads with pointed arch spandrel panels over them. The doors are of wood.
- b. Windows: The windows of the church are lancet shaped or rectangular. The lancet windows are set in rectangular or lancet shaped panels and vary in size. Lancet windows are found on the south (front) facade at the loft and main level, along the east side of the sanctuary, and the tower. All lancets are paired except for one in the sanctuary. At the loft level (just below the south front gable) there are four pairs of lancets, and paired lancets on either side of the entrance on the main level. The lancets in the tower are single.

Paired rectangular windows occur in the nave and along the west wall on the rear portion of the building. All windows have colored lights (cream color with colored pieces surrounding them). Windows are either hopper or casement. The tower windows are fixed.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The building has gable roofs. The main roof has its ridge running north and south and covers the nave. There is another gable roof (set at a lower level but in line with the main one) over the sanctuary. At the south end of the main building there is a cross gable roof. The main gable continues to the front of the building. The entry porch has a shed roof which partially blocks the view of the front doors. The roofs are covered with asphalt shingle tiles in brown; originally there were wooden shingles. The roofs take a slight flare near the eaves.

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- b. Cornice, eaves. The eaves are composed of a simple molded cornice between the rafter ends. The rafter ends project beyond the wall and are covered by a fascia.
- c. Tower: A tall tower is located near the front of the church on the east side. It is situated on the street side and is fully visible. The three level tower starts at the ground level and terminates in an octagonal spire (about 40' from eaves to summit). Its total height is about 70'.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Plan: The church proper is one large room (31' x 57') serving as the nave. In the rear of the nave (south end) is a narthex (added later) and a choir loft. The sanctuary (separated from the nave by an arch) is 22' x 20' wide. A new screen at the rear of the sanctuary was built to block out the organ equipment. To the west of the church spaces are the vestibule, sacristy, and work rooms. Across the north end of the building is a closed addition which houses the organ pipes.
- 2. Stairways: There are three risers from the nave to the sanctuary and two stairways to the loft at the southern end of the nave, composed of nine steps to a landing and eight more to the platform.
- 3. Flooring: Wooden floor boards of 3-1/4" have been covered by blue carpet in the walk areas of the nave and in the sanctuary.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The wooden dado and ceilings are of redwood. Above the dado the walls are of plaster painted off white.
- 5. Doorways and doors: There is a pointed arched doorway to the left of the sanctuary which leads to the side vestibule. It is composed of vertical boards over a wooden frame. Doors from the narthex to the nave are of wood and have small cross lights. The doors between the rooms to the west are wood and glass composed of vertical panels (two over two). There is a hollow core door to the rear room.

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6. Special decorative features, trim, cabinets: There is some notable woodwork (redwood), primarily in the chancel screen, altar rail, brackets for the trusses, and pulpit. The chancel screen is composed of slender arched openings with trefoil tops and a heavy cornice. It is surmounted by a large wooden cross. The altar rail is composed of squat pointed arches. The pulpit has decorative wood moldings. The bracket ends are turned.
7. Hardware: Originally the doors had strap hinges; now, only the exterior doors retain them. The doors also had wrought iron thumb latches.
8. Mechanical equipment: Two modern forced air units serve the nave from the south; the units are located in new compartments built into the narthex.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The church is situated about 4' above the sidewalk and street. It faces south with the east side facing a side street (E Street). The tower is on that side near the south end. The building fronts on 8th Street.
2. Outbuildings: The original rectory, built about the same time as the church, was a two story structure. It was moved to 12th Street and Roosevelt Avenue, National City, but has since been destroyed.

Prepared by Robert C. Giebner
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
August 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the San Diego Historical Society, the San Diego Historic Sites Board, the County of San Diego and the American Institute of Architects. The recording project was completed under the direction of James C. Massey. St. Matthew's Episcopal Church was measured and drawn the summer of 1971, by

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Professor Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona), project supervisor, with student assistant architect Jashina A. Tarr (University of California at Berkeley), Ronald J. Lake (Ball State University), and Phillip P. Wisley (Ball State University) at the San Diego California field office. The drawings were edited by William Klein in the HABS office. The architectural written data was prepared by Robert C. Giebner in August 1971; the historical written data was prepared and the material edited by Mary Beth Betts in the HABS office in January 1979. Photographs were taken in August 1971 by Marvin Rand.